

## Absence of Complaint

If we look superficially at the term "absence of complaint," it seems negative. It might not carry much weight for the committed Christian, especially for one who is consecrated, who officially before the Church, has promised to tend toward perfection.

Let us note that this apparently negative manner of speaking presupposes an awareness of our relationship with God and a love for our neighbor. Let us recognize that this attitude toward complaint permits us to acquire self-control and channels our energies enabling us to accept our profession and our work milieu. It would be unwise to ignore this means of perfection of humanity.

Let us not be stopped by these words: "absence of complaint." Let us seek to find in this seemingly sad facade all the perfection contained within, all the efforts that it may require.

*Absence of complaint* is not easy to live. We must be constantly on guard; if we relax our attention for a moment we can be dragged along in a torrent of moaning and groaning. Without realizing it, we become weaker and our sense of wonder is lessened.

## 1. Terminology

If we think seriously about the *absence of complaint*, we realize that it is a gift of God that cannot be separated from the sense of wonder. Those who persist in complaining about events and things around them can be considered like blind people who are incapable of discovering around them those little positive aspects which give birth to enthusiasm and create an open spirit filled by optimism.

On the contrary, if we endeavor to avoid complaint, we will feel a sense of wonder surge up from our souls, a wonder which has the power to radiate light on everything, a brilliant light full of human warmth. We will discover in ourselves an artist's heart ready to embellish all that surrounds us. All nature, work, dedication and generosity, as well as all events will develop an incredible creativity in us. We will be sowers of light and life.

Those who avoid complaint feel the need to go beyond themselves, to gather the positive everywhere: in everyday life, in nature, in what they see, in the events that they must accept. They sharpen all their senses in order to capture the beautiful, the good, the positive and the true, to create in themselves a vast openness so that their interior heaven may be inhabited by universal beauty.

The *absence of complaint* is a guilelessness that the Lord places in our eye; it helps us to unearth all that is positive, useful and agreeable in our work, in

our service, in events. "*If your eye is sour, your whole body will be filled with light.*" (Mt 6:22; Lk 11:34)

The *absence of complaint* is truly a strength that comes from God. By ourselves, we are unable to be quiet or to speak at the right moment. At the moment when the disciples rejected the project of the Eucharist, Peter responded to Jesus' question both in his name and in the name of his companions. Jesus said to him: "*Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but our heavenly Father.*" (Mt 16:17) A few moments later Jesus spoke of his coming death and Peter opposed such a subject of conversation that could disturb the peace of the group. Jesus rebuked Peter and said to him: "*Get behind me Satan, you are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does but as human beings do.*" (Mt 16:23; Mk 8:33) Like Peter we are open to the Spirit but unfortunately we can also unconsciously become the plaything of the devil.

The *absence of complaint* is a way of disconnecting ourselves from evil tendencies and of referring all to God, without whom we can do nothing. It is God who through his Spirit gives us the strength and the energy to accept a work or a trade and who gives us the light necessary to bring out all that is useful in events which may appear negative at first sight.

The *absence of complaint* helps us to discern God's way of governing the world, his way of directing each of us, of using events to mold us, orient us and motivate our reactions. He places an attraction for perfection within us; he gives us energy, courage, and dynamism, so that we can attain results.

The *absence of complaint* protects the sense of wonder in each of us. It gives us the desire to scrutinize events and to discover in them the divine will. It opens our minds and hearts to all that is positive in creation. Its objective is to help us concentrate on those qualities which give us a finishing touch and a visible perfection. It assures discipline, favors education and reinforces our Christian witness. It keeps our heart serene, our face joyful and our whole being in simplicity and spontaneity.

The *absence of complaint* moderates our attraction to sensible pleasure; it encloses our being within the limits of honesty; it mortifies, purifies, tempers, and masters our sensitivity. It revitalizes us and gives us an aspect of humility that renders us more welcoming and sociable.

The *absence of complaint* gives deep serenity to those who serve. Service offered in a complaining and grumbling spirit may be accepted because of necessity but it closes hearts and creates a persistent shyness. Service given with a smile and a willing heart is often the beginning of a durable friendship.

The *absence of complaint* vitalizes, and helps us to generously accept a difficult mission or a painful duty. It helps us to concentrate more fervently on what we are asked to do.

The exterior *absence of complaint* implies a free heart, because wonder is something that gushes forth from the heart and its number one enemy is complaint.

The *absence of complaint* manifests the spiritual maturity of a person, it expresses the basic quality of a personality which tends toward self-control.

The *absence of complaint* indicates a beautiful personality, one who has taken charge of his life, who has a sense of responsibility, who bears witness to vital dynamism and contagious energy. We sense the action of the Holy Spirit in this person who avoids complaint by developing patience, fidelity, perseverance, and self-control.

The *absence of complaint* demands that each of us make a constant effort which we call asceticism. The habit of avoiding complaint favors a spirituality which invites us to live in the light of the Lord and to benefit from his warm, paternal presence.

As we personified the absence of criticism, we can also give a face to the absence of complaint. Let us say that it is a delicate, discreet angel whom the Lord places at our side, to remind us that we are people of service, an impossibility if we live in the midst of complaint. Complaint is repulsed by service. The *absence of complaint* is an angel of peace who invites each of us to express all the positive elements that we can extract from our work, from our profession, from the events we have lived. This angel draws our attention to our quality of service rather than to our deficiencies. It shows us the advantages of our trade, of our employment and helps us to love all the instruments that we use to serve.

The mission of *absence of complaint* is to quiet the imagination and to sensitize the heart to the beauties of life. It is the bodyguard of the sense of

wonder, the watchman who stands guard over the whole person to keep him in a state of service.

Perhaps we know where we are going and we know the roads that lead there, but in moments of confusion who can brag that they do not need a guide? We know that God is our most effective point of reference; the absence of criticism protects the presence of God. The absence of complaint plays an analogous role, keeping us fixed in the love of our duty of state, activating our aspirations to dedication, animating our capacities to serve, accelerating our availability.

## 2. Definition of Complaint

Let's look around us, let's notice the people who strive not to criticize or complain; their faces are relaxed, they are friendly, welcoming, often they have a sense of humor. If we meet such people let us consider them the precious jewels that the Gospel speaks of and let us enter into a friendship with them. They will help us thanks to their maturity and self-control. At times we meet people who seem to adapt themselves to everything: they accept the sun or the rain, the summer or the winter with the same smile. With a bit of effort we can be like them; we have the same possibilities. It is simply a matter of considering our courage and setting to work.

On the other hand, we also come face to face with people who are always sad; they always have something to complain about. They have no con-

trol over their emotions. We sense that they are bitter, discontented, peevish and rebellious. Their faces are taunt and strained; their nerves are always on edge. Any little thing exasperates and irritates them. They continually think that others are picking on them, that they are being persecuted and they pose as victims. They are unhappy and far too much at the mercy of frustration; they cultivate anxiety, anguish, suspicion. The exterior complaint is a reflection of an embittered heart.

Let us try to give some descriptive definition of complaint and its damages. Then we will better understand the commandments of God that oblige us to love our neighbor and to seek the positive in his works.

*Complaint* is the exterior manifestation of discontentment in regard to something that touches us closely. It is the exteriorization of a frustrated sentiment; it is an unfavorable judgement made in regard to an object or an event either through weakness or through a lack of self-control. It is a depressing, pessimistic, negative expression of an uncontrolled sentiment.

*Complaint* and *criticism* are two contagious plagues of society; they are like air and noise pollution: only a few specialists try to do something about them. The majority of people are gradually poisoned in a more or less unconscious way.

*Complaint* is also a moaning, a murmuring provoked by a frustration or some contradiction. It is an act of impatience; our sensibilities become irritated, we become unbalanced by nervousness. *Complaint* is a cancer which ravages our sensibilities and

our countenance. It makes us gloomy; it dulls our smiles and diminishes the ardor of our heart. It stifles our energy, weakens our dynamism, shrivels us up and isolates us from others. It is a cancer that disfigures things and events, one which ruins our sense of wonder.

At first a *complaint* is only an idle word, a kind of "primo primi," a thoughtless reaction but then we sense that it is the product of immaturity, the invasion of our superior faculties (intelligence, will, conscience, heart) by foolish imaginings, unbridled sentiments and superficial or infantile manias.

Could the complainer be someone who has become handicapped: no longer supple, no longer having the ability to discover the plan of God in objects, events, nature or creation? Could they be persons who have become disabled: no longer capable of gazing in wonder at all that is beautiful? Could the complainer be those who are incompetent in their own eyes, who as time goes on see themselves as unloved, misunderstood, or victims? One would believe so, if these persons find it painful to take the blame, to modify their behavior or to overcome certain painful childhood experiences which left their mark. If they lose their self-confidence, if they prefer to complain rather than to react, if they prefer to remain in a cocoon rather than become a butterfly.

Complainers harass those who hear them; they disturb many people. Their presence is cumbersome; they love to call attention to themselves and to their suffering; they do not wish to be healed. Their conversations are as invariable as records

never playing anything new. They always give out the same lamentations, the same demands and arguments.

Complaint causes considerable damage. Look at them, we will discover them on the periphery of our being. They set our nerves on edge; they are like a bad case of shingles, continually itching. Is it not better to make our own inventory of the damage? We will not have the courage to let another do it because we would soon feel demolished. Some of the harmful effects caused by complaint are: a lamenting or murmuring that diminishes the efficacy of our service to others; a cause for drawing together those caught up in the same weakness; a type of paralysis that takes the ardor out of our work and causes us to withdraw into ourselves and become depressed, insecure, weak. Nerves are ruined and we are driven into a multitude of personal problems.

*Complaint* lessens the gift of our will to God, changes love into doubt and suspicion, breaks the rhythm of generosity, cools our devotion and smothers spontaneity. It turns us away from others causing us to withdraw into ourselves. It makes us detest discipline and exaggerate suffering; it multiplies complexes, limits the impulses of our heart and renders hateful what should be attainable work.

### 3. How Can We Avoid Complaint?

It is unnecessary to mention that *complaint* does not depend on events, objects or the nature that surrounds us. All events and all objects in nature have two facets: one positive and one negative. If our judgement is more often negative, it is because something in us is not running smoothly. We will not find a solution or remedy outside of ourselves for our habit of complaining. It is within our own mind, heart and feelings that we must seek to rectify whatever is not functioning. We must come out of our torpor or our reveries, take ourselves in hand and concentrate on decisive daily efforts. We must bind ourselves to an asceticism and accept a certain discipline. Experience proves that it takes a lot of courage to eliminate the habit of complaining.

The beginnings of this personal asceticism are painful: we are afraid of ourselves and of others. We dread being taken for naive, old-fashioned, or a holier-than-thou. We are alarmed at the thought of being judged unfavorably if we go against the pressures of a society that has made criticizing and complaining a normal habit. In certain milieu, if we are not against something or someone, if we do not fight or make demands, it is taken as a sign that we lack leadership and personality. It takes courage to go against the current, to walk against the wind, to climb a steep slope.

If we succumb easily to our tendency to complain, we must recognize our faults, assume our

own responsibilities and seriously question ourselves. We must get rid of this mania for seeing only the negative side of groups, communities, Institutes, associations; of seeing all their faults, defects and imaginable failures and of announcing our depressing discoveries to everyone. No one can correct themselves in the place of the other; it is a strictly personal affair.

We must all take charge of ourselves without worrying about what others will say. The development of our own personality demands it; true friends require it and in the Gospel Jesus himself begs us to become saints, taking the example of our heavenly Father. He commands us to love others, even those whom we perceive as enemies, adversaries, rivals or competitors. He points out the difference that must exist between a Christian, who is his disciple, and pagans. Pagans love those who love them and greet those who greet them. They love out of personal interest, for convenience or diplomacy; their love goes no further. But Christians must go beyond such reasoning. We must have respect for others and show them marks of friendship because this is what our heavenly Father asks of us, because the Lord himself wants to raise us to the heights of perfection.

In order to attain this exigent objective, we must even pray for our enemies, get rid of all rancor and free our minds from bad memories. We must forgive those who persecute us, who insult us, who lie about us. This is the prerequisite that enables the heart to take flight towards the heights of perfection. (cf. Mt 5:43-48) If we detest someone,

he will easily become the target of our criticism. We will find fault with all that he does and will not hesitate to complain about it.

Avoiding complaint is possible if we impose a rigid discipline on ourselves, for example, knowing when to be silent or asking pardon of those present. We must learn to take our share of the blame, to ask forgiveness, to manifest regret, to focus our energies on making a new beginning. We must also know how to forget past complaints, to clean up our hearts so that they will be free. Past complaints contaminate our hearts just as much as present complaints do if we keep them within us as psychological fatigue or rancor. The badly-educated children of resentment are sulkiness, irritability, anguish and fear. We must tear them out of our hearts, our memories and our minds if we would eliminate criticism and complaint. We must begin again each new day, exerting ourselves to follow a known, accepted and lived discipline. To avoid complaint is to protect our mechanism of service to others and to live in the presence of God.

In an association, group, team or community, before all else we must accept this principle: a Christian must avoid destructive criticism and complaint. Once this principle has been recognized by individuals and by the collectivity, we will be less likely to be afraid, to pass for one who is expendable if we endeavor to avoid criticism and complaint. We may be tolerant toward those who have not yet become aware of this impediment to fraternal love but there is no reason to walk around as if we had the weight of the world on our shoulders

simply because we are striving to overcome complaint.

When tepidity enters a group, people become afraid to speak of God; no one dares speak of graces received, or to carry a rosary. But those who bring this atmosphere into a group are not afraid to judge, condemn, criticize, complain, revindicate, or attack structures. Without realizing it, they have lost sight of their Christianity and taken on the traits of Marxism where contestation is an essential element of progress. Too often human respect, which in reality is only a lack of divine respect, causes us to do foolish things. We should be ashamed of our slackness, of our lack of ardor.

Let's make an effort in our milieu, so that the absence of complaint becomes a principle acceptable to everyone. Otherwise we will be obliged to excuse and defend ourselves for living attitudes demanded by our Christianity.

We must be personally convinced that to fight against criticism and complaint is a duty which it is not prudent to ignore or to treat lightly. If we do not have this conviction, it will become excessively difficult for us when we are in the midst of others who do not have the same ideals. Then tepidity, that distaste for effort, will reign in the group. The Holy Spirit will no longer have any influence because we will neither seek his presence nor his assistance.

Avoiding complaint constitutes a beneficial asceticism, helps to establish a solid relationship with God and fans into life the action of the Holy Spirit within us, an action that we are unable to stifle or

extinguish. It is not easy to avoid complaint: we need willpower and we need to set our backs to the task, to stick to a daily regime. We must begin each day with the same ardor. It is not something we acquire once and for all. It is not a diploma that opens the door to the world of business. Rather it is a beast to dominate and a steed to bridle as St. James tells us. To conquer oneself supposes repeated, multiple efforts every 24 hours, otherwise we lose our concentration and we become diletantes who lazily wait for good luck or a lottery prize to come their way in order to arrive at success. If the absence of criticism favors deepening our presence of God, the absence of complaint favors the quality of our service to others.

#### 4. How Can We Fight Complaint?

We must struggle against *complaint* in order to become collectors of the positive, so that we may scrutinize objects, events, nature and creation with the eyes of the heart. This search for the positive keeps the heart young, it keeps away wrinkles. Isn't it better to pass for naive or even a bit simple-minded but conserve the right to cultivate expressions of wonder. This reputation will make us happier than the reputation of being a hard-hearted person who has something negative to say about everything, who brings sadness and a gloomy atmosphere with them wherever they go; whose mouth is twisted by criticism and complaint. The heart is a field in which the Holy Spirit has been

sowing since our baptism. Are not criticism and complaint the weeds sown by the evil one to smother the good grain?

We must fight *complaint* if we want to develop an aptitude for detecting positive values in others. With a bit of good-natured observation, we will be able to congratulate others for their way of dressing, for their style, for their distinction, for the quality of their language. We will reveal the positive aspects of their intelligence and will. We will stop discrediting their style of thinking or their way of reasoning. If time and circumstances permit, we will have the joy of discovering profound qualities in those around us, such as their respect for others, their capacity for trusting, their sense of responsibility, their leadership, their qualities of courage, generosity, gentleness, and tenderness.

This is a marvelous and passionate study. We will have particularly stirring moments when, with simplicity, we reveal to others the results of our discoveries. We can already see them smiling as we tell them of the qualities we have discovered in them. Some will be sceptical while others will be stimulated and will thank God but all will be content. In these intense moments, we are truly living an outpouring of Christianity.

Let us not be stopped by old cliches disguised as proverbs, such as "compliments are often liars." They can be liars when they come only from the head but they are never false when they flow forth from the heart. The compliment that describes a positive attitude is contagious. When we receive it we are happy to repeat it to a friend in order to



receive approval. It gives such pleasure to hear others speak well of us and our activities. We spring towards the Lord with more energy and run towards others to bring them a bit of sunshine.

How can we fight complaint? This is a question that we pose often enough but do we really take the time to allow a valid response to flow from our hearts? Often we ask ourselves questions but we rarely bother to take the time to seek answers within ourselves. These responses may be inconvenient because they require the use of energy, cause disturbances and change our habits.

Why work so hard to fight complaint? Because this is an essential element of the spiritual life to which the Christian must submit in order to live properly the first two commandments: love God above all else, love your neighbor as yourself.

By avoiding complaint, we reawaken in ourselves that sense of wonder which permits us to discover the positive aspects in others and in their work, positive aspects that become like well-lit trails pointing out the way that leads to God.

It helps us to rediscover the sense of wonder which causes a reaction of astonishment/surprise to rise up in us when we see something agreeable and unexpected. Wonder is the spontaneous expression of a free and joyful heart. It is the infant's sudden awareness of the newness around him which leads him to the source of optimism. It is a vital dynamism that surges from the depths of our being, the serene energy that liberates, helps us to breathe and gives us the pleasure of creating.

## 5. Objective of the Absence of Complaint: Welcoming Events

We do not like to speak of complaint; we feel too vulnerable. As soon as the word is mentioned we are led to question ourselves. If we speak of absence of complaint we feel guilty; we know that perfection is not easy to attain. If the word "*complain*" tires us, we can substitute another word such as: temperance. Instead of saying let's avoid complaint, we could say: be temperate, but we must admit that this terminology is more abstract, more general; it doesn't touch us so deeply.

What is more concrete, to say "be temperate" or "avoid complaint"? The two terms have the same objective, but the invitation is not as strong in both cases. To avoid *complaint* is a concrete expression that we can carry out more easily. It requires a direct effort; it calls us into question and gives the impression that when looking at ourselves in a mirror we make a more significant gesture by putting our finger to our lips to remind ourselves to be quiet.

We can manage to live without complaining if we strive to discover the lessons that we can learn from *events*, be they happy or unhappy. We must detect in them the positive meaning that can help us. Just as God speaks through the Bible, so also he speaks through events. We must listen if we want to grasp his message and receive it.

An *event* is a happy or unhappy fact that places us in sometimes unforeseen situations. It is a fact

that assumes a certain importance, an invitation to become implicated in a new situation.

As we said, this event can be happy or unhappy. A happy event could be a promotion, the arrival of someone who betters my situation, a change that has been desired for a long time, a retreat, a meeting with a holy person, adherence to a resource group, etc.; perhaps it is something agreeable that was unexpected and surprising.

An event can also be unhappy. There are tragic, dramatic events which fall on us like calamities or catastrophes: a fire destroys our life savings; a company falls into bankruptcy; a person receives a change of obedience without warning; there is a psychological rejection from a person we love; a reputation is ruined by calumnies or false reports. An unexpected death, distressing news or a serious illness changes our best thought-out plans. An event never leaves us indifferent; it changes the present for better or for worse. Facing an event brings about three frequent attitudes; only one of them is profitable.

The *first attitude* is denial. We don't want to have anything to do with the event; we withdraw into our pain and accuse the Lord of being unjust. "Why do such things happen only to me." We persist in not submitting and even go so far as to abandon our religious practices. We break off all relations with God, proclaiming that prayer has no efficacy. We pray but nothing changes. In the depths of our hearts we nurture rancor, aggressivity and bitterness which causes others to say that we are rebellious.

The *second attitude* we can display when faced with an unhappy event is closing our heart. We hide the pain within ourselves while outwardly reacting as if we were above trials. We seek to distract ourselves; we refuse to speak of the problem and avoid those who would help us. Besides, as far as we're concerned they don't understand anything. We don't want them to speak about this hard blow which we are unable to accept. Interiorly, we become intoxicated; we are hedged in between anguish and anxiety. Our silence reveals to others the depth of our woundedness; they see us as the victim of circumstances. But in our hearts we know that we are being obstinate and deceptive. The rhythm of our life changes and becomes different. We develop a nervousness that we were once able to control.

The *third attitude* is welcoming. The welcoming of events supposes a control of our nerves and imagination. The objective of the absence of complaint is to help us welcome events be they happy or unhappy. In unhappy events, suffering remains just as acute but it is less devastating. By controlling our imagination and our nerves we can still ask questions: What is happening? What does God want to teach me by this event? What is he asking me to live? What is hidden in this event, in this unthinkable, unexpected situation? Suffering will help to sustain our faith and faith will establish itself in the midst of our confusion. We will feel less deprived. It takes time to find a solution to this enigma of suffering. At times the meaning of an

event is clarified in a few days; at times only months or years later.

One Sunday, my brother and I went to the house of some friends to play. I was twelve years old and my brother was thirteen. Camille and Gerard could not come out; they were going out with their father. We went to visit some other friends; they were going fishing with their father. A third visit and we had the same results. Both of us were sad and we sat on the edge of the sidewalk our feet in the gutter, asking ourselves questions. We had lost our father nine years earlier. Why did God take our father? We too, on this lovely Sunday in spring, would have been with him and we would have been happy like our friends. At supper, alone with our mother and a younger sister, we asked the question: why did God come and take our father? He knew we needed him. My mother answered: My poor children, I suffer as much as you do from this separation. Often I too have asked myself the same question. Why? Why? But I have never found the answer. If one day God gives it to me I will pass it on to you.

Thirteen years after this conversation, I celebrated my first Mass before my family. I was happy to be a priest and all my family were thanking God with me. After thanking my mother asked: "Do you remember the question that you asked me one day. If you are interested, I received the answer during Mass. If your father had lived, you would not have become a priest. Your father was a business-man, he was a success in all that he attempted. He was proud of his two sons. He would

have drawn you into the whirlwind of his activities. He had little attraction for studies and you would have started work very young. If God chose you to be his priest, he had to open up the way for you and he did. To be a priest is a great gift, my son, but it's very costly. It was 22 years later that the meaning of this enigma was clarified for my mother.

It is here that the *absence of complaint* plays an important role. It disciplines the heart, fortifies our faith, gives us a certain self-control, help us to focus our sights on God who submitted his own Son to the caprices of events.

Every reasonable creature is conditioned by events. Jesus himself led an earthly life that was turned upside down by often unforeseeable events. Events caused him to be born in a cave in Bethlehem instead of in a cradle at Nazareth; they caused him to grow up in exile, to travel to Judea, Samaria and Galilee. His voyages, his teaching, his style, his manners were all conditioned by events. An event is a sealed envelope; it must be opened if we are to discover the will of God in it.

Those who endeavor to avoid complaint develop a great gentleness of heart. They benefit from a grace that we can call the *courtesy of the Holy Spirit* which infuses into the hearts of those who love a gentle way of thinking, acting and reacting.

Events play a considerable role in human life. In order not to be broken, we must learn to read the messages that they carry. Events condition everyone's existence: today we are in one place, tomorrow in another. Events move us and transport us

from one part of the world to another. We must believe that the smallest event of the day as well as the most serious event of our lives speaks its own language which we can learn to understand.

The *absence of complaint* is the key to the enigma concealed in every event. All is providential. Jesus said, I wish no harm to anyone but I want all to be converted.

Everything should draw us closer to God, the active source of our being. He makes us flexible through the pressure of events. Place, time, temperature, climate, the occupation of others — everything affects and conditions us. We must admit it and accept a certain measure of dependency. Events speak and the absence of complaint disposes us to listen. It is not a matter of analyzing events to find their causes but rather to grasp the sense of the message that they bring. We must recall this proverb from Holy Scripture: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and instruction fools despise.*" (Prv 1:7)

Fear of the Lord is not a troubling fear, nor a fear that terrorizes. It is a sensitivity of heart in the presence of God seen as a Father full of goodness and tenderness, slow to anger, having unlimited mercy. This sensitivity is heightened when we avoid complaint and criticism. It becomes a principle of wisdom and even contributes to forming us in wisdom. (cf. Prv 9:10; 15:33) Protected by the absence of complaint, sensitivity calms us, creates a favorable climate for reflection and is truly a gentleness of heart, a tenderness expressed in peace.

If we are capable of thinking of God, of nourishing ourselves with his presence, of avoiding criticism and complaint, it is because we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have recognized that we are beings of service. Then we can say with Jesus: "*I did not come to be served but to serve...*" (Mt 20:28) The height of friendship is to give our lives for those we love: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.*" (Jn 15:13-14)